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ABSTRACT

First-year evaluation results of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification pilot program were reported for the four community colleges participating: Northeast Iowa, Des Moines Area, Western Iowa Tech, and Iowa Western. The pilot sites represented a variety of adult basic education instructional environments that included a workforce development center, an adult correctional facility, an adult learning center, an adult basic education and general educational development (ABE/GED) classroom, a residential treatment facility, a residential care facility, an even start program, and a vocational training center. Results included the following: (1) a total of 323 basic skills certificates were issued to 307 adult students; (2) 16 adult students received multi-level certificates; (3) a total of 15 percent of the basic skills certificates were issued at certification level A; 37 percent at level B; 39 percent at C; and 9 percent at level D; (4) the average number of instructional hours to earn a basic skills reading certificate was 90-112; (5) the average number of instructional hours to earn a basic skills mathematics certificate was 85-104; (6) the certificates build the self-esteem of adult students; (7) the certificates effectively benchmark learning gains at both the student and program level; (8) the certificates provide a common language among educators, employers, agencies; and (9) the basic skills certification program provides one of the major outcomes measures for Iowa's basic literacy skills program. (KC)

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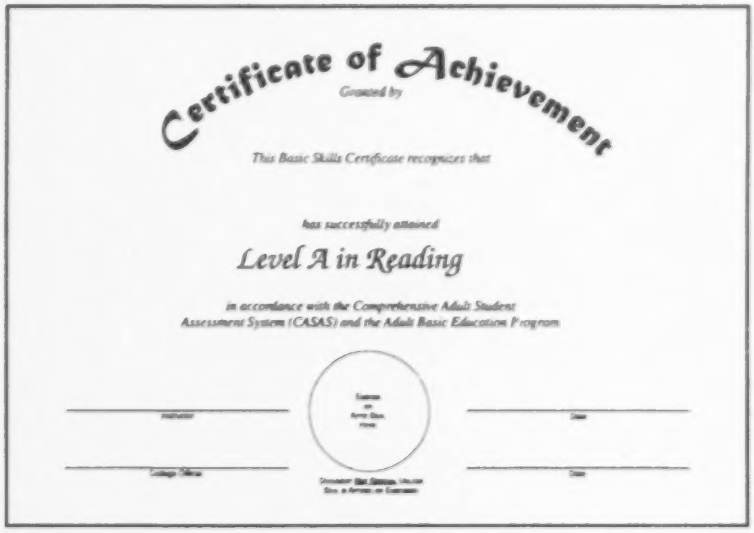
First Year Evaluation of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program


Certificate of Achievement

Granted by

This Basic Skills Certificate recognizes that

has successfully attained

Level A in Reading

in accordance with the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) and the Adult Basic Education Program

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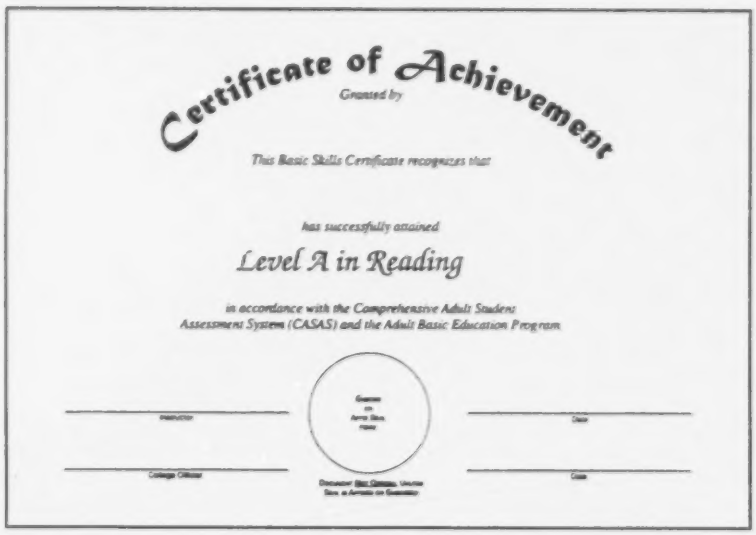
First Year Evaluation of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program



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Instructor

Date

College Official

Date

Iowa Department of Education
Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation

August 1998

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Introduction

The purpose of this publication is to present the first year evaluation results of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification program.[1] There were four (4) community colleges which participated in the first year pilot projects. The community colleges were:

- Northeast Iowa Community College;
- Des Moines Area Community College;
- Western Iowa Tech Community College;
- Iowa Western Community College.

The pilot sites represented a variety of adult basic education instructional environments which included: (1) workforce development center, (2) adult correctional facility, (3) adult learning center, (4) ABE/GED classroom, (5) residential treatment facility, (6) residential care facility, (7) even start, and (8) vocational training center. The first year results indicated the basic skills certification program was effective in a variety of adult basic education instructional environments.

Observations

The following observations included in the pilot project reports indicated:

- a total of 323 basic skills certificates were issued to 307 adult students (see *Graphs 1* and *2*);
- 16 adult students received multi-level certificates (see *Graph 1*);
- a total of 15 percent of the basic skills certificates were issued at certification level A (see *Graph 2*);
- the majority of the basic skills certificates were issued at certification levels B (37 percent) and C (39 percent) for a total of 76 percent (see *Graph 2*);
- a total of 9 percent of the basic skills certificates were issued at certification level D (see *Graph 2*);
- the average number of instructional hours to earn a basic skills reading certificate was a range of 90-112 (see *Graph 3*);
- the average number of instruction hours to earn a basic skills mathematics certificate was a range of 85-104 (see *Graph 3*);
- the certificates build the self esteem of adult students;

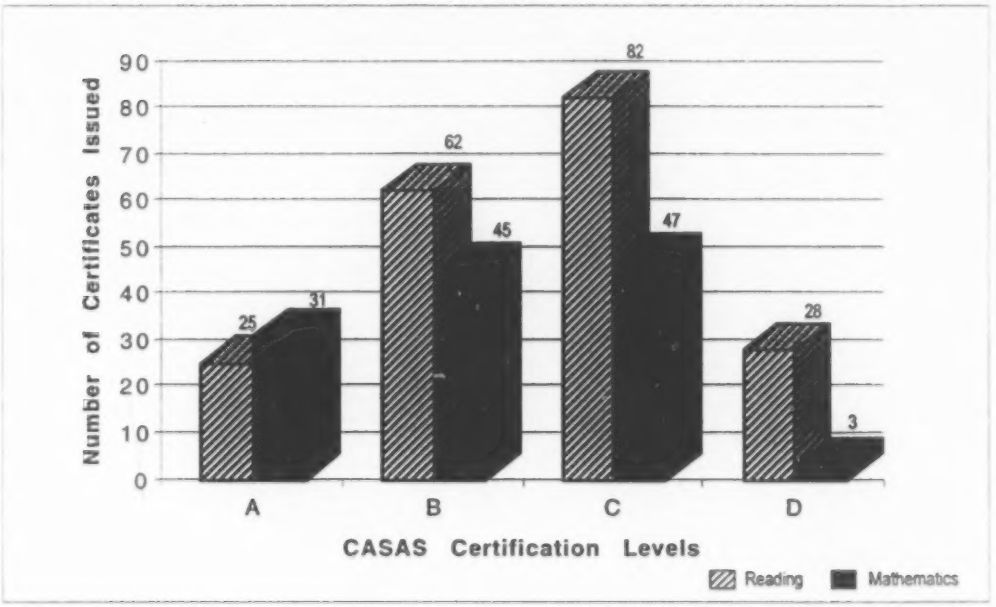
[1]The reader is referred to the following publications for a thorough discussion of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification program, identified target populations and literacy rates: (1) *Basic Skills Certification Manual: Guidelines for Iowa's Adult Basic Education Program* (accessible on the Internet at website <http://www.state.ia.us/educate/commcoll/basic.html>, (2) *A Supplemental Report on the Performance Levels of Iowa's Adult Basic Education Target Populations* (accessible on the Internet at website <http://www.state.ia.us/educate:commcoll/perform.html>), (3) *Adult Literacy Proficiencies* (accessible on the Internet at website <http://www.sunspace.com/alp.html>.

- the certificates effectively benchmark learning gains at both the student and program level;
- the certificates provide a common language among educators, employers, agencies, etc.
- the basic skills certification program provides one of the major outcomes measures for Iowa's basic literacy skills program;
- there is a direct observable relationship between the level of performance on the CASAS ECS/130 Appraisal and the CASAS level at which the majority of the certificates were issue;
- the basic skills certification program will be expanded to other basic literacy skills educational settings and to other community colleges.

The individual community college pilot site reports constitute the rest of this publication.

GRAPH 1

NUMBER OF BASIC SKILLS CERTIFICATES ISSUED BY CASAS CERTIFICATION LEVELS AND SUBJECT AREAS

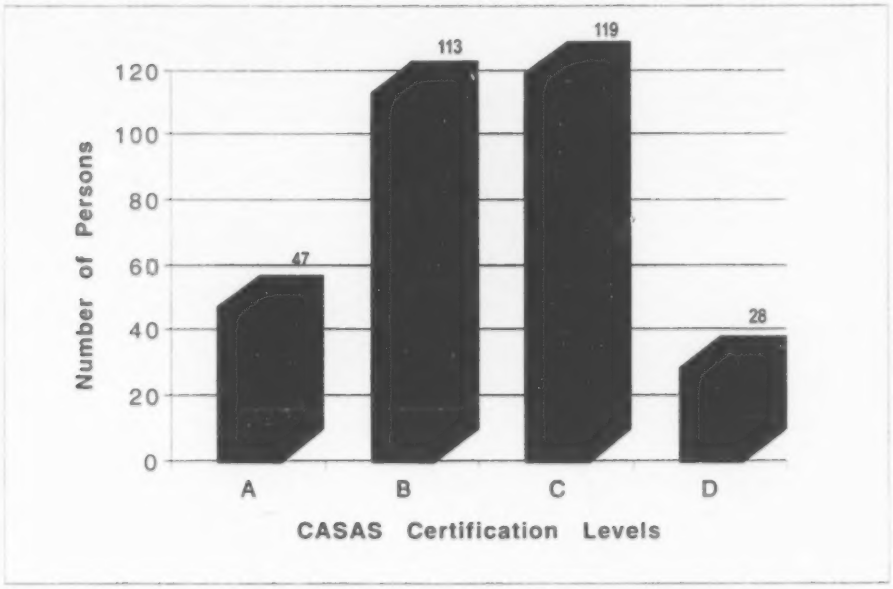


Four community colleges participated in the first year of Iowa's basic skills certification program. A total of 323 basic skills certificates were issued to 307 students. 16 students received more than one certificate.

Source: *First Year Evaluation of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program* (August 1998): Iowa Department of Education.

GRAPH 2

NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO RECEIVED BASIC SKILLS CERTIFICATES BY HIGHEST CASAS CERTIFICATION LEVEL

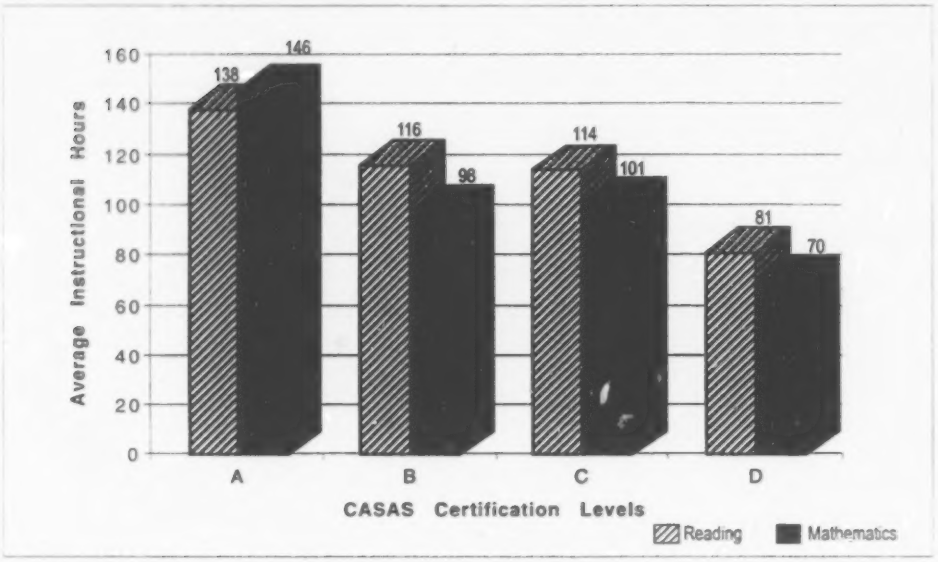


Four community colleges participated in the first year of Iowa's basic skills certification program. A total of 323 basic skills certificates were issued to 307 students. 16 students received more than one certificate.

Source: *First Year Evaluation of Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program* (August 1998): Iowa Department of Education.

GRAPH 3

AVERAGE NUMBER OF INSTRUCTIONAL HOURS TO ACHIEVE EACH CASAS CERTIFICATION LEVEL



The mean instructional hours for obtaining a basic skills reading certificate was a range of 90-112. The mean instructional hours for obtaining a basic skills mathematics certificate was a range of 85-104.

Source: *First Year Evaluation of Iow's Basic Skills Certification Program* (August 1998): Iowa Department of Education.

Northeast Iowa Community College

Adult learning Center

Dubuque, Iowa

Submitted by:

Mary L. Strom, Coordinator
Adult Basic Education
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Pilot Site Teachers:

Laurie Nolan
Eileen Herring
Carlotta Schmidt

INTRODUCTION

During the past several years, Northeast Iowa Community College has integrated competency-based education into the adult basic education program throughout the eight county district of northeast Iowa.

The CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System) is the primary assessment tool for assessing basic skills in a functional life skills and employability skills context. TOPSpro 2.0 (Tracking Outcomes for Programs and Students) was the software system utilized for tracking student demographic data, learning gains, test scoring and results. With this in place, it became easier to benchmark student performance and learning gains in reading and math.

Adult Basic Education teachers felt that issuing certificates of achievement below the GED level would motivate learners to continue in the program. Certification would be a means to communicate performances to stakeholders such as JTPA, employers, Workforce Development Centers, as well as learners and their important others. It was decided to issue certificates for CASAS levels A-D as developed by the Iowa ABE consortium during fiscal year 1997-98. The time frame for this study is July 1997 to June 1998.

NICC is a rural district serving residents of eight counties encompassing a 4991 square mile area in northeast Iowa. The site chosen for implementing certification was the adult learning center located in downtown Dubuque, Iowa, a city of 60,000 people. Approximately five hundred ABE learners enroll during a typical year at this learning center.

This learning center is located adjacent to low-income housing, an industrial park and within a block of the local Workforce Development Center which also houses JTPA. The Substance Abuse Service Center, Alternative High School and Vocation Rehabilitation office are one block in the opposite direction.

The majority of enrollees are able-bodied welfare recipients and the least educated school dropouts. This population is difficult to serve as they usually have multiple barriers to learning and little tenacity.

NICC's downtown adult learning center is an open-entry, open-exit learning center serving adults sixteen years and older who have officially dropped from school. Individuals may chose supervised independent study or small group instruction. One full-time and one half time instructor facilitate individualized study. One ABE teacher facilitates small group instruction which meets 2.5 hours twice a week. Learners may chose to study independently in the learning center and also attend group instruction. Teachers correlate curriculum and materials.

A description of the process from enrollment to certification follows:

- Learner enrolls via TOPSpro 4EU entry record.
- Reading and Math skills are assessed via CASAS Employability Competency Skills (ECS) 130
- Reading and Math Level tests (A-D) follow with learners receiving a profile of competencies and interpretation of scale score.
- Learners achieving 235-250 on the CASAS scale move into GED pretesting.
- TOPS profile of competencies is used to select curriculum.
- After 60-80 hours of individualized or small group instruction, learners are invited to post test.
- The lead teacher checks post-test score, verifies scale score and selects appropriate certificate.
- Learners are presented appropriate level certificates with a gold seal embossed with NICC's school stamp and signed by both lead teacher and ABE Coordinator.
- Learner's assessment data and certificate issued date documented in TOPSpro 2.0

Number of Certificates Issued 1997-98

The following reflects certificates issued for the period of January 1 - June 30, 1998.

CASAS Leven	Number of Certificates Issues		Unduplicated Count by Highest Certification Level
	Reading	Mathematics	
A	3	1	3
B	4	3	6
C	9	6	9
D	8	0	8
Total	*24	*10	**26

* = duplicated count

** unduplicated count

Number of Instructional Hours for Earned Certificates

Average of instructional hours for learners receiving Reading certificates vary by level.

Level	Reading	Mathematics
A	53	53
B	63	63
C	64	64
D	80	0

ANECDOTAL OBSERVATIONS

Certificates were presented to learners on an individual basis on the last day of the month in which the post test was taken. Certificates were issued in an 8 x 11 business envelope for safekeeping. Responses from learners upon receiving certificates included reactions of surprise, exuberance, pride, smiles, confidence and continuation in the ABE program.

Comments from learners upon receiving certificates:
- I'll use this to show my future employer.
- I took this to my interview but I heard no comment.
- I'll show this to my supervisor the next time he "needles" me about when I will get my GED.

Comments from important others when shown the certificate by learner:
- Payee said, "This is great and I'm very proud of you."
- You worked very hard to get this. Congratulations!
- Mommy, I'm very proud of you. You set a good example for us.
- My pastor placed it on the church bulletin board.
- Community living supervisor said "Nice job, Ken. Keep up the good work."
- "I'm very proud of you. I can't wait until you get your GED." - husband
- That's great, I'm happy to see that you're attaining your goals." - Promise Jobs case-worker.

Conclusions

- Learners were surprised and elated to receive an official certificate from the community college with a gold seal and statement benchmarking skills achievement. This was an important milestone for them.

- Teachers who dislike test administration were pleased to have the opportunity to issue certificates of achievement. Surprised faces and resulting happy smiles rewarded ABE teachers.

- A basic skills certification program should be implemented only after careful study and consultation with the teacher. Certification is not appropriate for developmentally disabled or chronically mentally ill learners. Psychotropic medications and health problems may impact learner performance and skew results. Learners may fall back rather than gain due to mental health problems.

- Family problems, personal problems and health factors must be taken into consideration before administering skill assessments. A learner who does not feel well or one who is facing difficult problems will not test to the best of their ability.

- During the past year, ABE teachers and the program coordinator agree that issuing certificates below the GED level should continue. Certificates affirm skills and success. Certificates motivate and encourage continuation in the program. Success builds upon a success.

- NICC's ABE program will continue the certification process. Class sites for future expansion include a rural GED preparation classroom and a pre-vocational training program where participants prepare for supported employment opportunities.

Des Moines Area Community College

Workforce Development Center

Des Moines, Iowa

Introduction

(1) Type of setting: Workforce Development Center, 215 Keo, Des Moines, IA.
(2) Target population: Primarily welfare recipients
(3) Number of persons: n=65
(4) Number of instructors: n=1

Number of Certificates Issued

CASAS Level	Number of Certificates Issued		Unduplicated Count by Highest Certification Level	
	Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics
A	0	5	0	5
B	23	36	21	36
C	34	12	33	12
D	1	0	1	0
Total	* 58	* 53	**55	53

* = duplicated count

**unduplicated count

Utility of Certificates

To whom were certificates shown: Promise Jobs and JTPA case workers; prospective employers; probation officers/other correctional setting personnel

Purpose of certificates: Primarily for documenting basic skills attainment for employers and benchmarking instructional progress for student and program information

Number of Instructional Hours for Earned Certificates

CASAS Level	Reading	Hours of Instruction
A	0	0
B	23	90
C	34	90
D	1	90

CASAS Level	Mathematics	Hours of Instruction
A	5	120
B	36	110
C	12	90
D	0	0

Anecdotal Observations

Instructor: Student involvement in their own educational process seemed to increase. Students seemed to have a greater sense of ownership of the learning process. Certificates were high motivators.

Adult Learners: "Feels good to know I'm not dumb and to prove it." "Until I get my GED, this gives me something to give to my caseworker to show I'm working (on my skills).

Conclusions

Only Concern: Educate WDC partners, Iowa Dept. of Employment Service employees, prospective employers about the basic skills certification program.

Western Iowa Tech Community College

ABE / GED Classroom Settings

Sioux City, Iowa

Submitted by:

Christine Case

Overview of WITCC Basic Skills Certification Implementation Sites

Site	Type of Setting	Target Population(s) Served	Approximate Annual Enrollment	Number of Instructors
ABE/GED Classroom	Learning Center Individualized/small group/ computer-aided instruction Daytime and evening	Single parents Welfare recipients High school dropout (all ages) Juvenile/adult offenders At-risk youth Employed/underemployed/unemployed Developmentally/ mentally disabled College-bound	478	4
Residential Treatment Facility	ABE/GED Self-contained classroom Individualized/small group instruction 8 hrs./wk. (evening)	Juvenile offenders	33	1
Even Start	ABE/GED/ESL classrooms (2) Individualized/small group/computer-aided instruction 16 hrs./wk. (daytime)	Limited-English speaking adults Single parents/"traditional" families Welfare recipients High-school dropouts Employed/underemployed/unemployed	39	2
Residential Care Facility	Self-contained ABE classroom Individualized/small group instruction 14 hrs./wk. (daytime)	Developmentally/ mentally disabled adults and youth	42	1
Vocational Training Center	Self-contained ABE classroom Individualized/small group instruction 10 hrs./wk. (daytime)	Developmentally/ mentally disabled adults and youth	18	1
		TOTAL	610 Enrollees	9 Instructors

Number of Certificates Issued and Average Estimated Instructional Hours

CASAS Level	No. of Certificates Issued Reading	Mathematics	Unduplicated Count by Highest Certification Level	Average Estimated Instructional Hours Reading	Mathematics
A	10	3	13	100-200	Not enough data
B	15	12	27	130-230	30-90
C	24	24	46	50-190	55-130
D	11	2	12	50-60	90
TOTAL	*60	*41	**98		

*=duplicated count

**=unduplicated count

Utility of the Certificates

Student Perspectives: See Attachment: *Certificate of Achievement Survey Results*

Instructor Perspectives: The following three questions were posed to ABE instructors involved in the implementation of the Basic Skills Certification program:

1) ***What purpose do you think the certification program and the certificates serve?***

It gives recognition and encouragement to those who have studied but are not ready for a GED. It is something to work toward which helps with motivation.

The certificates serve as a form of accountability. Students are proud of their achievements and it's a stepping stone to the next level.

Encouragement, retention of learners, increased self-confidence and self-esteem. GED is not possible for all students so for some this may be their only recognition. For others this is a more short-term goal with GED far in the future.

Provides record of accomplishment for lower-level students who are enrolled for a long time but may never achieve a GED (or may achieve the GED but it is a lengthy process).

The purpose is to measure the amount of improvement for specific skills at each level indicated, to verify certain skills are mastered, and to improve basic comprehension and critical thinking skills not only for reading and math but also for everyday living skills.

2) ***What impact have the certification program/certificates had with your students?***

The certificates help to build self-esteem, provide a measure of success, and motivate students to continue with their studies so that they may achieve their GED.

- Gives the students tangible evidence that they are progressing
- The descriptors show potential employers what the student's capabilities are

Has encouraged them to continue to work toward their goals; has helped make all of us, staff and students, more aware of progress needed and achieved, competencies learned and those still to be learned. Students have become more goal-oriented. Has given students something **concrete** to prove their accomplishments or show others.

I was only able to give one student his certificates in person. He seemed pleased, but a 17-year-old won't share a lot about his excitement. He said his parents were proud of him.

The student who got certificates was very excited and was going to hang them up at home.

3) ***What anecdotal observations/comments/concerns/suggestions do you have about the certification program/certificates?***

We must use this program more in the future. I think it is an excellent idea.

I am very pleased with the certificates, the information on the back is right on target. Students are very proud to receive them.

It's good that certificates list life and job skills (bank statements, payroll) helping students see relevancy of what they're learning to getting a job or a better job and to see real-life need for math and reading. The program has actually helped staff demonstrate to students what competencies are needed when they have an unrealistic idea of timeframe or readiness to test GED. I've even had a high school graduate who is upgrading ask about what's needed to earn her next certificate.

- Most comments have been positive.

- One negative was an instance where a student with potential showed a B-level reading certificate to his mother, she assumed he was doing wonderfully, and allowed him to slack off (a 17-year-old). This is not a fault of the certification program, however.

I am glad that we have the certification program available to us. I wish that it could have been implemented sooner as I believe many students benefit from it. Of the four people who have received certificates, three of them will start and/or complete official GED testing.

Conclusions

Based on student and instructor experiences, it is evident that the implementation of the Basic Skills Certification Program has been positive and worthwhile.

As the ABE Coordinator, it has been gratifying to participate in three poignant Certificate Awards ceremonies. Witnessing the pride, the sense of accomplishment, the smiles, and in many cases, the presence of family and friends, validates the Basic Skills Certification program.

Second-Year Goals

- Educate Welfare Reform, Workforce Development, business/industry partners about the Basic Skills Certification (BSC) program
- Continue to market the value of the Certificates of Achievement to the adult learners and teachers

- Expand BSC program to other ABE sites
- Continue to explore and implement strategies affecting student retention resulting in more learners achieving "the next level" and "the next level"
- Employ CASAS Assessment/BSC program in new (fall '98) area alternative high school
- Implement Tracking of Programs and Students (TOPSproJ) software

WESTERN IOWA TECH COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (ABE) PROGRAM
CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT SURVEY RESULTS
June 1998

Dear Student Achiever,

As someone who earned a Certificate of Achievement, please complete this important survey. Your response will help us know what you like about the Certificate(s) as well as how the program could be improved.

Thank you!
ABE/GED Staff

Directions: For each question, please check all responses that apply to you.

1. I attend(ed)
   - 3 Central Campus Daytime
   - 1 Central Campus Evening
   - 4 Residential Treatment Facility
   - 14 Even Start
   - 1 other Work Activity Site

2. I earned Certificate of Achievement

4	Reading, Level A	1	Math, Level A
7	Reading, Level B	4	Math, Level B
8	Reading, Level C	5	Math, Level C
4	Reading, Level D	1	Math, Level D

3. I received my Certificate between
   - 4 October and December
   - 4 January and March
   - 15 April and June
   - July and September

4. I received my Certificate of Achievement
   - 14 in an Awards ceremony
   - 8 from the teacher(s)
   - in the mail
   - 1 other _____

5. I recommend that future Certificates be awarded
   - 18 in an Awards ceremony
   - 4 from the teacher
   - 1 in the mail
   - 1 other _____

6. My goal is to earn
   - 4 Reading, Level B
   - 4 Reading, Level C
   - 5 Reading, Level D
   - 14 the GED
   - 2 Math, Level B
   - 2 Math, Level C
   - 5 Math, Level D

7. I've shown my Certificate to
   - 22 family and friends
   - 3 employers/potential employers
   - 3 teachers
   - 4 counselors
   - 2 parole/probation officers
   - 1 other what I think necessary

8. Earning the Certificate of Achievement
   - 17 is something I'm proud of
   - 14 has improved my self-esteem
   - 8 accurately describes my reading and math skills
   - 12 has increased my motivation to learn
   - 1 is no big deal

9. I would encourage other students to study for a Certificate of Achievement
   - 22 yes
   - no
   - 1 not sure

10. Other Certificates of Achievement should be available in
    - 19 writing
    - 14 listening
    - 8 oral communication
    - other _____
    - parenting
    - 2 job skills
    - other _____
    - other _____

11. I am
    - 21 a student in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program
    - 2 no longer attending the ABE program because
      - 1 I'm working
      - 1 I've completed my goal
      - I have no transportation
      - I have no child care
      - personal/health reasons
      - other _____

12. Please write your opinion of the Certificate of Achievement program. What do you like? What don't you like? How could the program be improved?

Code: (Reading, Math/Site)

RTF = Residential Treatment Facility

CC = Central Campus
ES = Even Start

Comments:

I like the idea of the certificates but I would think it would be much better if I got it in an Awards Ceremony.

(D, C / RTF)

I liked the class. I wish I had more time to study. It's hard for me to concentrate when working 2 jobs & not getting enough sleep. Otherwise, the class was good for me. We have a good teacher.

(D, B / RTF)

You now have a very good program, in which I fell is helping alot of people-
in alot of different ways. Your Certificates achievement program helps build self esteem in oneself.
I don't think the program could be improved any better than it is right now.

(D, C / RTF)

I like hear other people say they are proud of me and I should keep up the good work. I think this is a great program and I think more people should enroll in the program.

(B, A CC)

The certificate of achievement is a good idea and I like it. It gave me the motivation I need. It has improved my self-esteem and it is something that I am proud of. I like the whole Certificate and I don't think anything can be improved.

(B / CC)

I think the program is a good one and helps you improve your self-esteem. The Certificate of Achievement program works to build your likes and dislikes in the way you think and do your work. If you fill good about yourself it will help you in your every day life.

(C / CC)

I liked the certificate because I can shwon to my family I want they to know than I lear English and I feel proud. Thack you Kris for the certificate.

(B / ES)

I liked the certificate because I fell good and I want to come to study more.

(A / ES)

I liked the certificate because I am feel proud and happy. and I want to lern more.

(B / ES)

I liked, because has increased my motivation to learn. and aproved my self-esteem.

(B / ES)

I liked the certificate because I could show it to my family. for my school work.

(A / ES)

I like the my certificate because it is important to me.

(A / ES)

I liked my new certificate.
I'm pround myself because give me know How more my English and to grow and I know my skills it is very important to me. thank you!

(A, B / ES)

I liked the certificate because I showed it to my family. I also liked to see it.

(B / ES)

That certificates make me feel proud of my self I like that because this encourouge to anybody to be able learn more and more.
This was a great surprise to me when I shown to my son's they ask, me this mean you will go at college? That make my family feel proud of me.

(C, C / ES)

My certificate is very important for me because those encourage me for learning more and more Englesh and other.

(C / ES)

I like very much get a certificate for these levels, I feel happy and motivate for finish my goal. I think the program provides all things we need.

(C, C / ES)

I liked the certificate because it reminds me of my efforts attending school and helps me feel better. It also helps me to encourage other to come to the program.

(D, D / ES)

I know the certificate is wonderful for my self-esteem
I fell proud, and important, and want to start the next level, for my superation, and the my family.

thank you.

(C, C / ES)

I want to say thanks to you for The wonderful idea of the certificate. that great you make me feel proud of my self.

(C, C / ES)

Iowa Western Community College

Clarinda Correctional Facility (CCF)

Clarinda, Iowa

Submitted by:

Doris Dick
Project Coordinator

INTRODUCTION

The Education Department of the Clarinda Correctional Facility (CCF), a men's medium security prison, Clarinda, Iowa, has been a participant in the CASAS Testing/ Certificate Pilot Project in Iowa. CCF currently houses approximately 1000 inmates. Nearly 400 students have been served since the project tracking began in October 1996. There were eight instructors on staff at the beginning of the project. Currently there are eleven instructors in the Education Department. Doris Dick, Iowa Western Community College instructor at CCF since September 1994, has been the coordinator of the CASAS project.

The students who participate in the educational programs at CCF are very often those with special needs. They have not completed high school or a GED program or are reading below a sixth grade level. Ages of the students have ranged from sixteen to over seventy-two years. Several are serving very long or life sentences. CCF has an international-multicultural population. Many of the inmates who are in school may be awaiting, currently in, or have finished the substance abuse treatment program. Other inmates who are in the education programs may be in the resource room (special education), Title I classes, or the ESL program. Still others may be in or have been in protective custody situations. ALL of these individuals frequently have to deal with low self-esteem and learning challenges. Sometimes these challenges can be addressed by simply showing the student that someone actually cares. Other times the student needs to be able to work without time constraints and pressures but with great amounts of encouragement to help raise self-esteem.

The education department may also have students who have finished treatment and need to only complete a limited number of GED tests. These students generally move through the education program very rapidly. They also need positive reinforcement. Simply showing them the correlation between their CASAS score and predicted GED score may be all the encouragement needed to "take the plunge" with a positive attitude. Or using the individual profile developed through CASAS testing to identify the "foundation holes" in a student's knowledge may bridge the gap so more efficient progress can be made.

Number of Certificates Issued

CCF uses the Life Skills version of CASAS. Seventy-five students received ninety-two certificates between October 1996 and early June 1998.

Number of Students* Earning Certificates			
Level	Students	Reading	Math
A	26	10	16
B	23	11	12
C	19	15	4
D	7	6	1
	75	42	33

*Unduplicated count—A student may have received a certificate in more than one area (Reading/Math) and/or in more than one level.

Certificates Issued by Subject Area and Level		
Level	Reading	Math
A	10	16
B	11	12
C	15	4
D	6	1
	42	33

Seventeen students earned multiple certificates. Two students earned a second certificate in reading. Two students earned a second certificate in math. Twelve students earned a math and a reading certificate. One student earned two reading and two math certificates. That student was an example of a person who, when he received appropriate help and encouragement, was able to raise his self-esteem and work to his potential.

Utility of the Certificates

The pilot CASAS testing/certificate program, which is currently in use at CCF, is one tool which the instructors use to help ascertain the educational needs of the students. The tests have been given approximately every three months, beginning October 1996. Instructors use the test results to identify the strengths/weaknesses in a student's knowledge. The results can be used to help identify information which is unlearned, lost (perhaps due to trauma and/or substance abuse), or forgotten. Correlations can be made to GED score ranges. Class profiles aid the instructors in lesson planning and class make-up. Advancement tracking and pre- and post-tests are used to document student progress.

Certificates have been awarded to those who have met the established criteria. The instructors who have worked with CASAS testing during this period (October 1996 through June 1998 and beyond) report that the students are anxious to get the test results. They look forward to earning the certificates and prize them. The instructors have found that those who are *rapidly* completing the GED process may value the CASAS certificates less than those who are not at that stage of their educational program. Although this does not always hold true; once earned the GED certificate often takes several months to reach the student. The CASAS certificate is a more immediate reward for work accomplished.

Earning the certificates creates a feeling of self-pride which shows outwardly and in the students' work. The students now realize that they "can do something on their own" and "that someone else also knows that they can!" The certificates are attainable, realistic goals for those who are slow-processors, for those who have been suppressed and been made to feel that learning was impossible, and for the ESL students. Families show great pride in their father/son/husband who has earned a certificate for his work. That certificate may have been his first "true" educational achievement.

Education is part of the treatment program at CCF. The counselors use the results of the CASAS testing as one piece of documentation for program completion. Employers can use the descriptors affixed to the certificates as guidelines to a person's accomplishments. The certificates can be used as verification of achievement/progress for various agencies which work with the inmates. The information can also be used to help with work site placement.

Number of Instructional Hours for Earned Certificates

Average Number of Hours per Level/Form				
CASAS Level	Reading Average	"TC"*	Math Average	"TC"
A	212	(3)	212	(7)
B	131	(1)	158	(3)
C	172	(3)	154	(1)
D	183	(7)	50	(3)

*"TC" - Valid test score range equaled/surpassed on first attempt. Student not in education program at next testing

Anecdotal Observations

As the instructor who has been coordinating the CASAS/certificate program at CCF during the pilot project, I will offer some observations. The students mentioned will not be identified by their actual names.

"**Tom**" - When I first met Tom, he was in a literacy program. He knew that the substances that he had abused had created problems with his learning capabilities. He was unable to retain information for more than a few minutes at a time. He was a very determined, persistent student. Tom did become frustrated and dropped out of full-time school for a period of time. During that time he did continue to work on his own. Now, three years later, after great effort on his part, he is reading at a much higher level. His math abilities have returned at a more rapid rate, thereby enabling him to do rather difficult math in relation to his reading. Tom will not be able to complete his GED in the near future. He *does* take great pride in his accomplishments and works very hard. The CASAS certificates are the only tangible rewards that he can currently receive.

"**Henry**" - Henry is a student who has had limited prior educational opportunities. He came from a very abusive home. It took him quite a while to be able to trust the teachers and accept instruction. Once those hurdles were passed Henry was able to learn to read and do math. His reading abilities have not kept stride with his math. Often he will do very difficult math problems simply by following the examples since he is not always able to read the explanations. The certificates are Henry's only reward. They have helped draw him out of his shell as he can now "see" that his work has value to others as well as himself. He now has a reason to try his best.

"**Robert**" - Robert is a man who has physical characteristics that often led to his being teased and at times persecuted by other inmates. In the past, he had been told so many times that he was too "dumb" to learn that he believed it. He had continued to read. He asked if it was possible for him to learn anything. The answer was "YES!" Robert was given a CASAS test. By this time Robert felt safe in school. He confided to his teacher that he was "in danger on his living unit." Appropriate procedures were followed and he was placed in a protective environment for a period of time while the situation was being addressed. In the meantime, the testing results had been received. Robert had done very well, thus earning a certificate. His instructor took the certificate to him. When Robert returned to school, he thanked his instructor for helping him stay out of trouble and healthy. He especially thanked his instructor for bringing the certificate. He related that this was the first time that he had ever received any recognition for work that he had done. Having that certificate to look at and remind him that he was worth something and could accomplish something was what "kept him going" during the month that he was in restricted status. He continues to be a very hard-working student.

"**James**" - According to James, "A certificate is only a piece of paper." He claims to not care about the certificates. But, James is always one of the first to inquire if the results are back. He *does* care about the scores. He has reached an educational plateau and is easily frustrated. Even though he claims to not care, he has yet to refuse a certificate.

"**Jose**" - Jose represents several English second language students who are learning to read/write English and/or any language for the first time. Any tangible reward for their efforts that they can show and send home is extremely important. It gives them and their families **great** pride. We have had pictures brought to show us the framed certificate on the wall at home. (This has happened with other students as well.) Receiving this proof of accomplishment is important not only for the student but for the family as well.

"**John**" - John is a young man in the resource room who did not even make it through junior high school. He is making progress but has much to learn before earning his high school diploma or GED. He may not complete his education while at CCF, but the CASAS certificates which he *can* receive keep him working. Again, they are tangible proof of accomplishment.

"**Fred**" - Students who have come from remote, often underdeveloped regions, inner city areas, or from migrant families are represented by Fred. These men have developed survival skills, much like an ESL student. Often they have developed their own version of a language based on limited, sometimes sporadic, early schooling. They are now learning "the basics" for the first time. They will probably never attain a GED thereby creating even more need for the CASAS certificates for rewards. Most of these men are very proud and grateful for any help which they receive.

During interviews for an ABE Practitioner Research Project, which I completed in June 1998, students were asked questions regarding various types of testing. Responses pertaining to CASAS are reprinted here.

"STARE" - A review of *Student Assessments* and *Reactions* to varying types of *Testing* programs and how issuing awards and certificates has served as *Encouragement* for students.

The "STARE" project was undertaken in an effort to better understand how students at this men's special needs correctional facility perceive various types of testing. Responses were gathered from the students concerning the types of testing included, whether or not they felt the testing to be beneficial, and any recommendations they, the students, might have as to testing procedures....

A questionnaire was prepared for the respondents' use. The questions were read orally to each person. The students were asked to reply orally with their answers recorded exactly as given. A student could write his own responses if he so requested. Written responses have not been grammatically corrected. A total of forty interviews were completed, resulting in a minimum of five responses for each type of testing within each age group.

It is hoped that the responses to the interviews may give instructors and test administrators new or better insight into problems which the students face when testing. Differences in viewpoints due to age appeared for some questions. Some students presented suggestions which they felt would result in a more "user-friendly" testing situation or better test preparation, thereby relieving some test anxiety.

A summary of the responses to the questions included in the interviews and the student suggestions are on the following pages. Thirteen of the respondents were twenty-one or younger; twenty-seven were twenty-two or older. This is approximately the same proportion as found within the CCF Education Department at the time of the interviews.

The questions asked are shown followed by the age-indicated responses. Percentages are based on the number of students responding to a question. If a student had not been involved in a type of testing, subsequent questions regarding that type of testing were not pursued, resulting in data shown as "*NA." Comments are enumerated following the "Why/Why not" data for a particular question. Observations are included at this point, if appropriate.

QUESTION

21-: (21 and under)
22+: (22 and over)
**NA: (Number of students who had not taken this type of testing)...*

Have you taken a CASAS test? Y N

21-:	Y - 13/13	100%	N - 0/13	0%
22+:	Y - 27/27	100%	N - 0/27	0%

Have you taken a CASAS test more than once? Y N

21-:	Y - 3/13	23.1%	N - 10/13	76.9%
22+:	Y - 22/27	81.5%	N - 5/27	18.5%

Do you feel CASAS testing is beneficial? Why/Why not?

21-:	Y - 9/13	69.2%	N - 4/13	30.8%
22+:	Y - 23/27	85.2%	N - 4/27	14.8%

WHY - (21-)

- "Yes, because it tells them how much you learned."
- "Yes; Because it helps out our math skills."
- "Yes. So I could be taught more things."
- "Yes. As above. [Just to see where I'm at - what I need to study on.]"
- "Yes. Because it's a very specific way of telling the student what he/she needs to work on."
- "Yes - cause you can find out exactly what you need to work on."
- "Yes. Helps me find what I need to work on to pass my tests."
- "I feel the same for this test As for the TABE. It helps somewhat."

(22+)

- "If I'm in school, yes."
- "Yes, due to the fact that it finds out where you're at."
- "To see if you've bettered your skills that you're not good in."
- "It lets you know where you're at. It gives you proof on your reading and math."
- "It could be. There are some things in there that I haven't known or understood."
- "Maybe for the administrator - not for the student."
- "Yes. See level."
- "Yes, so the teacher knows where I'm at."
- "Yes. It sends you in the right direction. Anything to better your reading is helpful."

WHY NOT - (21-)

- "No don't learn anything from it."
- "No, I don't see that it is beneficial to anything."

(22+)

- "I don't think it's beneficial because it's not going to get you out of school."
- "No. It's a waste of time. We're here to get a GED not take extra tests."

OBSERVATIONS - (21-) The responses "No, because I don't like taken them." and "I don't know. I don't understand why we took it." were probably the most revealing. Some people just do not like taking tests. But, more importantly, we have to be sure the students understand why tests are being administered!

(22+) The response from the older students was more positive. They had a better understanding and appreciation for the usage of additional testing to assist them in obtaining the goal of a GED and/or self improvement....

What suggestions would you make to change/improve testing processes? Be specific. Do your recommendations apply to all types of testing? If not, identify the type(s) of test(s) to which you are referring....

(21-)

- "Don't over stress or we'll do terrible. Need extra time to be able to get our work done and learn better. Don't push us too hard."
- "Leave it the way it is. Music helps keep me relaxed and do my work."
- "Read the tests to me. [Let me] listen to some of the questions."...
- "I think all test should be on computers. I think we should be able to use calculators. Do more reading instead of writing."...

(22+)

- "I'm not a morning person. Testing in the morning is bad. I don't take my time or do well. It's hard to stay focused when other people are doing things I find more interesting. Testing should be done at a person's best time."
- "I don't see how it can be improved any better than they all ready are."
- "The way we do it now is fine. It shows how the levels are and where I am."
- "Yes, on the computer, and maybe extra time with a one on one tutor. Because a lot of people have trouble doing it on there own."...
- "Need a testing room...."
- "Having testing groups in a more quiet area. Keep groups small in numbers."
- "In the p.m. instead of the a.m. 7:45 and hard boiled eggs doesn't start the testing day well."

OBSERVATIONS - (21-) "I think they need to explain how to do it more on all the tests so it is easier to understand." is a comment that should make all instructors and test administrators think again! Are we giving instructions in their language and terms or ours? Are we providing the best atmosphere possible for testing? Are we giving needed accommodations? Have our students in need been identified? [Because I conducted the interviews, I know that some of the most insightful suggestions, for all types of testing, came from students whose abilities don't qualify them for GED testing!]

(22+) As with the younger group, many of the suggestions dealt with accommodations of some type. This is probably due in part to the fact that CCF is a special needs facility so the students are very aware of accommodations. Providing a quiet testing area free from distraction is a definite need. Sometimes providing such an area is a challenge! Whenever possible a student should be allowed to test at his best time of the day.

The receipt of encouragement is always important! Throughout the educational programs at this correctional facility awards and certificates have been used....

- Currently awards and certificates are issued for achieving specified levels during CASAS testing. The encouragement a student receives through this program has resulted in better effort and better test results. Self-pride has increased resulting in continued and stronger progress. Family pride is evident in the feedback the students receive....

These are a few examples of the instances where tactile and visual encouragement are used or have been used at CCF.

The CASAS certificates and course completion certificates have also been used as evidence of satisfactory achievement for employment and required program documentation. Counselors can use this documentation as a tool for tracking and recommendation as well.

Self-esteem is built through pride in accomplishment and tangible rewards through the awards/certificates received. A feeling of pride and self-worth can be seen when students are included and asked for their opinions. Better self-esteem results in happier, more productive, more successful students.

# # # #

This study has reinforced my feelings that giving *feedback* and *rewards* of some type to the student are beneficial. It has also shown that we, as instructors, need to constantly be aware of whether or not the students are understanding what we are trying to communicate. We need to *listen to* and *observe* the students. If a student does not understand the reason(s) and/or instruction(s) given for an assignment or a test, the result is apt to be less positive. There may be less cooperation and/or less effort put forth. This appears to be especially true with younger students and those who have more difficulty understanding educational jargon which is sometimes found in standardized testing instructions. Yes, it is O.K. - *necessary* - for us as educators to *"STARE"* - get student assessment, react and get reaction, and encourage!

CONCLUSIONS

After having worked with these students for a period of years and with this specific project since October 1996, I can see a definite need for a "first level" certificate that is not currently available. This certificate would be used for students who work at a slower pace and thus do not show their full potential on the timed CASAS Appraisal test. The full CASAS test is untimed so that a student's actual ability is measured. When a student first takes the full length test and surpasses the ability level demonstrated on the appraisal, he is often showing his true potential. Especially with a special needs student, self-esteem is fragile. If reward is not forthcoming, effort may diminish and/or cease. Having to wait for another testing period may squelch serious effort. Other students who are close to finishing their educational programs may not be with our program sufficiently long enough to complete a double testing cycle. These students also deserve recognition for appropriate work. We have developed Achievement Awards for those students who have not yet been eligible for CASAS certificates. Students who achieve a higher level with the second (or subsequent) CASAS testing would be eligible for the certificates which are currently being issued.

Has this program been beneficial? YES! Self-esteem and pride have visibly increased. Work effort has increased and sustained with reward. Is the CASAS certificate program worth continuing? Again. YES!

Appendix A

Guidelines for Submission of First Year Evaluation Reports for Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program

STATE OF IOWA

TERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TED STILWILL, DIRECTOR

NO: 98.016

DATE: January 20, 1998

TO: Mary Strom, Mary Entz, Chris Case, Pam Southworth

FROM: John Hartwig, Consultant
Bureau of Community Colleges

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Submission of First Year Evaluation Reports for Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidelines for submission of the first year evaluation report for Iowa's Basic Skills Certification Program. The report is due to me by **July 15, 1998**. In compiling the report, be comprehensive in scope but concise and to the point. In order to provide continuity in printing, please submit the report on a 3 1/2" diskette along with a printed version of the report. The report should be compiled utilizing MicroSoft Word version 6.0 or below. This narrative report will complement the report that will be compiled on the number of certificates issued (see memorandum #98.001 dated July 27, 1998 titled *Instructions for Completion of Annual Performance Report for FY '98: Iowa Basic Skills Certification Report for FY '98).*

NARRATIVE SECTIONS

The report should contain the following headings and information:

Introduction

This section should present an overview of the report including: (1) type of setting in which the certification program is currently utilized (i.e. corrections, secondary education, special education, learning center, workforce development center, etc.), (2) target population(s) served at the pilot site (i.e. welfare recipients, at risk youth, ESL, corrections, special populations, low level functioning adults, workforce development, etc.), (3) approximate number of persons enrolled in the program, setting or class for which the certificates are being issued, (4) number of instructor(s) involved with the certification program.

GRIMES STATE OFFICE BUILDING / DES MOINES, IOWA 50319-0146
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Number of Certificates Issued

This section should report the total number of certificates issued for the year by CASAS Level and subject area according to the following format:

Iowa Basic Skills Certification
Report for FY '98

CASAS No. of Certificates Issued Level	Unduplicated Count by Highest Reading	Mathematics	Certification Level
A			
B			
C			
D			
TOTAL	*	*	**

*=duplicated count

**unduplicated count

The category titled "No. of Certificates Issued" should report the **total number of certificates issued at each level by subject area**. These two categories will provide a duplicated count at CASAS Levels B, C and D due to the fact that adult learners may have earned multiple certificates at different CASAS levels and in different subject areas.

The category titled "Unduplicated Count by Highest Certification Level" is designed to provide an **unduplicated count by CASAS level** of the number of persons who received certificates. A certificate recipient should only be counted once and only reported at the highest certification level (i.e. if a person earned a Level B reading certificate, a Level A mathematics certificate and a Level C mathematics certificate, the person would only be counted at the Level C category since this was the highest level certificate earned). The intent of this category is to determine the number of persons who received multiple certificates.

Utility of the Certificates

This section should describe the utilization of the issued certificates. It should delineate to whom the certificates were shown (i.e. employers, social workers, parole officers, teachers, counselors, etc.) and the purpose (i.e. benchmarking instructional progress, documenting basic skills attainment for employers and others, etc.).

Number of Instructional Hours for Earned Certificates

This section should describe the approximate range of instructional hours involved in earning different level certificates (i.e. how many instructional hours did it take, on average, to earn a level A certificate in reading, a level B certificate in mathematics, etc.).

Anecdotal Observations

This section should describe the important observations that instructors, employers, social workers, adult learners, etc. reported regarding the basic skills certification program. Please be specific in documenting the anecdotal observations.

Conclusions

This section should include any summary observations, remarks, concerns, etc. regarding the first year of implementing the Iowa Basic Skills Certification Program.

SUMMARY

Given the diversity of the different Pilot Site Projects, the guidelines are generalized to serve as a reporting format. Your individual report should reflect your own writing style and include other sections that you feel are important. The main criteria to follow, in drafting your report, is to write in a clear, concise manner. Please keep your report under ten pages.

Sincerely,

John Hartwig, Consultant
Bureau of Community Colleges

JH/bse